



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### **The Essence of the Union" ...': Unionism, Nationalism and Identity On These Disconnected Islands**

**Citation for published version:**

Rosie, M & Hepburn, E 2015, 'The Essence of the Union" ...': Unionism, Nationalism and Identity On These Disconnected Islands', *Scottish Affairs*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 141-162. <https://doi.org/10.3366/scot.2015.0064>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.3366/scot.2015.0064](https://doi.org/10.3366/scot.2015.0064)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Scottish Affairs

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



**Michael Rosie and Eve Hepburn**  
**University of Edinburgh**

***‘The Essence of the Union ...’: Unionism,  
Nationalism and Identity On These Disconnected  
Islands***

**Abstract**

Linda Colley (1996) identified three key ‘glues’ for the British Union state created in 1707: extensive wars with France; a uniting sense of Protestantism; and a burgeoning commercial and military empire. This article explores how two key parts of this project - namely, ‘unionism’ and a collective sense of ‘Britishness’ – has become increasingly disconnected in different parts of the United Kingdom. In particular, it examines the extent to which, following Colley’s historical argument, white and Protestant citizens remain more likely to identify with political Unionism and Britishness as compared to other ethnic and religious groups. The discussion includes an analysis of the degree to which ‘feeling British’ and ‘valuing the Union’ overlap, and whether a connected unionism can be discerned against trends which increasingly place emphasis on the *sub-state nation* as a key political community of attachment and identity.

**Key words:** Britishness, Unionism, religion, ethnicity, national identity

**Introduction**

In her influential study of the forging of British national identity, Linda Colley (1996) identified three key ‘glues’ for the Union state created in 1707: extensive wars with (first Catholic, then Revolutionary, then Napoleonic) France; a uniting sense of Protestantism; and a burgeoning commercial and military empire. The British project, bringing together England, Wales, Scotland and - much more problematically – Ireland, was forged in war, sanctified by God, and rewarded through profit. In this article we explore how two key parts of this project - namely, ‘unionism’ and a collective sense of ‘Britishness’ – has become increasingly disconnected in different parts of the United Kingdom. In particular, we will explore the extent to which, following Colley’s historical argument, white and Protestant citizens remain likely to identify with political Unionism and Britishness as compared to other ethnic and religious groups. The discussion includes an analysis of the degree to which ‘feeling British’ and ‘valuing the Union’ overlap, and whether a connected unionism can be discerned against trends which increasingly place

emphasis on the *sub-state nation* as a key political community of attachment and identity.

## **Disconnected Unionisms**

Unionism across the United Kingdom has long comprised quite different histories and traditions. In explicit party political terms the 'Unionist' label came to prominence during the Irish Home Rule crisis of the 1880s. Under pressure from Irish Nationalists Gladstone committed to a Dublin legislature as part of a rather vague and evolving policy of 'Home Rule All Around'. Gladstone's puzzle was how to secure and strengthen the United Kingdom – not least the Union between Britain and Ireland – whilst accommodating growing Irish self-assertion within it. 'Home Rule' aspired to a delicate balance between the ultimate sovereignty of the Imperial Parliament, and the interest of national partners within the UK. In event of doubt or conflict, Gladstone insisted, Westminster *must* prevail:

... I define the essence of the Union to be this ... A supreme statutory authority of the Imperial Parliament over Great Britain, Scotland, and Ireland as one United Kingdom ... The unity of the Empire must not be placed in jeopardy; the safety and welfare of the whole ... must be preferred to the security and advantage of the part.  
Gladstone (1886)

Although Gladstone explicitly eschewed the term 'federalism' this was, arguably, his general direction of travel. But reforming visions of the union were swamped by hostility. Irish Home Rule tore the Victorian Liberals in two with a Whiggish 'Committee for the Preservation of the Union' joined by more radical figures led by Joseph Chamberlain. Adopting the name 'Liberal-Unionist' the schismatics made common cause with the Conservatives. 'Unionism' was thus sharply re-defined and mobilised as trenchant defence of the Constitutional *status quo* and, in particular, opposition towards the 'Irish threat'. Alliance in Opposition was followed by formal Coalition in Government from 1895, and amidst the Ulster Crisis of 1912 the two parties formally merged. The intention had been to name the new entity 'The Unionist Party', but grassroots criticism led to the more cumbersome 'Conservative and Unionist Party' (Lexden, 2012).

This brief excursion into anti-Home Rule politics reveals the broad and changeable nature of 'Unionism' even in a Westminster Parliamentary context. Gladstone's proposals were themselves cut from fundamentally unionist cloth, his paramount principle maintaining 'the essence of the Union'. The reaction explicitly (and successfully) appropriated the term 'Unionist' and thus, for a century and more, it defined 'the Union' as the Constitutional *status quo* and denoted trenchant resistance to any and all federalist or devolutionary (let alone separatist) proposals to alter that Union.

Furthermore, post-Edwardian anti-Home Rule politics demonstrated a crucial and rapid territorial disconnection. In two constituent parts of the UK, the 'Unionist' party label was preferred over 'Conservative' and thus stamped the

term explicitly and politically thereafter. In Scotland the party was termed the 'Scottish Unionists' with 'Unionism's distinctive symbolism and imagery ... jealously guarded ... to the extent that the term Conservative was expurgated from all official [Scottish] Unionist literature' (Seawright, 1996:96). The Unionist label was dropped in Scotland only in 1965. The other deviation was, and, is Northern Ireland where Unionism continues to define one side of a fierce territorial, political, religious and ethnic struggle over status and power. The adoption of the terms by Scottish Conservatives, and its ongoing Northern Irish associations has led to a complex identity for the 'unionism' in Scotland and Wales. For the Conservatives it was a badge of pride, for Nationalists it was an accusation to throw at Liberal and Labour. Only very recently has the term crept back into the political lexicon to (uncomfortably) encompass all those who oppose further autonomy/independence for Wales and Scotland.

To cast this debate in a contemporary light, the media in Scotland routinely described 'Better Together', the cross party platform campaigning for a Scottish 'No' in the 2014 referendum, and their three key constituents – the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties - as 'unionist' (see, e.g., Reid, 2013, Scotsman, 2013; Sunday Mail, 2013; BBC 2014). In light of the long campaign leading up to 2014 there was a broadening out of the term 'unionist' to reflect a range of views, straddling the federalist heirs of Gladstone (Liberal Democrats), those proposing further devolved powers (Labour and at various times the Conservatives), and those proposing little change, or opposing any further change whatsoever (at other times the Conservatives). Notably, however, unionism remained an awkward term: and one all too rarely found in the formal rhetoric of Better Together, let alone Scottish Labour, or the Scottish Liberal Democrats. For example, neither the terms unionist nor unionism featured in these parties' 2011 election manifestos, nor in the 64-page interim report of Scottish Labour's Devolution Commission in 2013 (Scottish Labour, 2011, 2013; Scottish Liberal Democrats, 2011). Likewise the four keynote speeches at Scottish Labour's 2014 conference in Perth contained no references to unionist/unionism (Scottish Labour 2014).

That having been said, neither did Labour explicitly *eschew* these terms until several months after the referendum. In January 2015 the new leader and deputy leader both explicitly distanced themselves from unionism. Jim Murphy insisted that he had "never been a unionist", noting that his ethno-religious background precluded it: "As a family of Irish Catholic immigrants, we're not unionists. I grew up in a family of trade unionists, but we're not political unionists" (quoted in Clegg 2015). Several days later Kezia Dugdale echoed this rejection: "The first thing I would say is that I don't define myself as a unionist, it's not what shapes my politics" (quoted in Sunday Mail 2015)

Given the term unionist has been politically and religiously coded in Scotland, and thus viewed with deep discomfort amongst many Labour activists, it is clearly a *meaningful* term in Scotland's political landscape. By sharp contrast the term 'Unionist' more or less disappeared from England's Conservative politics from the 1920s: the removal of the Irish Question from Westminster politics in 1921 also removed any urgency to proclaim a 'Unionist' position. As an illustration of this, the extensive online archive of the Margaret Thatcher

Foundation contains a searchable database of her speeches, press conferences and media interviews between 1945 and 2004. Whilst explicit references to unionists and unionism loom large, these are almost exclusively in the context of *trades* unions. The context and venues of Thatcher's few *explicit* invocations of British Unionism are revealing - she declared her party as Unionist *only* in the contexts of Scotland and Northern Ireland, e.g.:

... since the Act of Union, Scotland has had a proud history as a distinctive nation within the United Kingdom. We in this Party believe in a Scotland that continues to play a full part in the Kingdom and on equal terms. Now that every other Party in Scotland is challenging that role, it is vital that we defend it. Some people say that we're not a Scottish Party. But neither are we an English Party nor a Welsh Party nor an Irish Party. We are a Party of the whole United Kingdom. We are the Conservative and Unionist Party. And we will always be a Unionist Party.

Thatcher (1988 – see also 1985a and 1985b)

Conservative Unionism in the later twentieth century, therefore, operated at the UK's national peripheries and had two key purposes: to placate and reassure Northern Ireland's British-Protestant community and to rally local troops against Nationalist and devolutionary sentiment in Scotland and Wales. 'The Union' seems to have had little or no resonance at the centre (i.e. England) *except* in relation to these (more or less) pressing threats to the territorial integrity of the United Kingdom. The very meaning of 'the' Union and of 'unionist' cannot, therefore, be taken for granted. Like 'Britishness' these are historically malleable terms with quite different resonances (and perhaps little resonance at all) in different parts of the United Kingdom. The unionist glue, so to speak, has historically had its key functions at the *edges* of the British Union, in Scotland, in Wales and – *par excellence* – in Northern Ireland. It is less clear the extent to which, if at all, unionism matters in England.

The remainder of this article, then, seeks to explore the assumption – implicit in Linda Colley's analysis of the 'glues' that hold the UK together - that people supporting the Union and identifying most strongly with Britishness were historically likely to be white, Protestant citizens. To what extent, we ask, does this characterisation hold today? This is a pertinent question given the profound social and cultural transformations that have taken place in the UK over the last century. The UK is no longer the homogenously 'white' place it once was; through the decolonisation movements of the post-war period, and increasing immigration more recently, the UK is now a *de facto* multicultural country (even if recent UK governments have eschewed the policy of multiculturalism). Likewise, the decline of 'Protestant Britain', through the rise of religious pluralism and then a wave of thoroughgoing secularisation from the 1960s, have created a multi-faith, and perhaps post-Christian society (see, e.g., Brown 2009). So how does concepts of Unionism and Britishness filter through the diverse society(ies) of the UK? Do white Protestants still invest the greatest attachments in Britishness and the Union (as Jim Murphy's implied incommensurateness of unionism and Irish Catholic immigrant

heritage might imply), or have other ethnic and religious groups adopted these attachments as part of their integration?

This article, therefore, focuses on a series of interlinked questions. Firstly does Britishness (still) matter, at personal and political levels, across the United Kingdom? As a litmus test of this, does Britishness possess a unifying, integrative purpose? That is, to what extent do different ethnic and religious groups – including white, minority ethnic, Catholic, Protestant, no religion and other faith - embrace a sense of Britishness and how does this compare to their views on or sub-state identities such as being Scottish or English? Does unionism – in its broad sense of defending the continuing territorial integrity of the United Kingdom – matter, and, if so to whom? Finally we analyse the degree to which ‘feeling British’ and ‘valuing the Union’ overlap.

### **On (Not) Feeling British**

Britishness, like any other identity, is not ‘fixed’ and ‘flat’ but malleable and historically and contextually specific. What it meant in 1915 is not what it means in 2015; and what it means in suburban London may not be at all what it means in rural Wales. Further, as Colley (1996:6) reminds us ‘Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time’. We should not, then, think of national/territorial identities as a zero sum matter – rather, individuals mix, prioritise or nestle their identities with and within others. In terms of national/territorial identities it is no contradiction to feel, for example, British *and* Scottish *and* European *and* Jamaican, or to prioritise one or other of these in different situations. Furthermore, there has been considerable academic and governmental interest in Britishness and its (lack of) capacity to fully integrate and welcome a range of ethnic communities (see e.g. Parekh 2000; Modood 2007). Thirdly, the politics and rhetoric around ‘race’, ethnicity and multiculturalism play out very differently in different parts of the United Kingdom (see, e.g., Hepburn 2014; Hepburn & Zapata-Barrero 2014). Whilst Westminster politics has long featured a hostile agenda around immigration and race - and has recently witnessed a stampede towards the right in response to UKIP’s strident anti-EU and anti-immigration rhetoric (Birrell, 2013) - the political situation at Holyrood is radically different. Here a demographic crisis of an ageing (and until recently shrinking) population, along with Scottish ‘myths’ around inclusion, have fed a cross-party consensus (if not a broader public view) that a welcoming attitude towards migrants is both an economic necessity and a Scottish ‘tradition’ (see Hepburn, 2011; Hepburn & Rosie, 2014).

To what extent, if at all, do these different nuances around unionism and around race/inclusion mirror the extent to which people describe *themselves* as British across the component parts of the United Kingdom? To unpick these questions we examine data from major datasets between 2009 and 2011, i.e. the period immediately prior to the long campaign around Scotland’s 2014 independence referendum. To begin the analysis we report responses to an ‘open’ question on British identity whereby the respondent is shown a card naming a number of possible identities (British, Irish, European, etc) and prompted to choose as many (or few) as they feel are personally relevant and

to volunteer other identities that may not be on the card. The wording of the question in the 2011 British Social Attitudes survey was:

Please say which, if any, of the words on this card describes the way **you** think of **yourself**. Please choose as many or as few as apply.

Table 1 reports the findings in the three component nations of Britain in 2009-11 (Northern Ireland is discussed below). Here we have merged the British Social Attitudes surveys from 2009, 2010 and 2011 and done the same with the Scottish Social Attitudes surveys from the same years. Merging these datasets allows greater purchase on small sub-samples, particularly amongst ethnic and religious minorities:

Table 1  
**‘Open’ national identities across Britain, 2009-11**

Thinks self as ...	ENGLAND	SCOTLAND	WALES
British	<b>68</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>61</b>
English	<b>57</b>	5	13
European	12	9	4
Irish	2	3	2
Northern Irish	*	1	*
Scottish	2	<b>83</b>	1
Ulster	*	*	*
Welsh	2	1	<b>63</b>
Asian	2	1	1
African/Caribbean	1	*	1
Other answer	4	4	2
None of these	1	1	1
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>8,751</i>	<i>4,174</i>	<i>557</i>

Sources:

England, Wales = merged BSA datasets 2009-2011;

Scotland = merged SSA datasets 2009-2011

There are four key points to take from Table 1 and which underpin our subsequent analysis and argument. First, simple arithmetic supports Colley’s point about ‘hats’: many people in each territory chose more than one identity. Key amongst these are those who chose both their ‘state’ identity (i.e. being British), and the ‘sub-state’ identity of their territory (i.e. being English, Scottish, or Welsh). There are some differences in this across territory - in England 34% chose a combination of English/British; in Wales 31% were Welsh/British; and in Scotland 39% were Scottish/British. We should not assume that these dualities are directly comparable. There are a number of claims, for example, that whilst Scottish and Welsh people draw a relatively clear distinction between Britishness and their sub-state identities, in England any distinction is fuzzy (Bond & Rosie, 2010; Langlands, 1999; Kumar, 2003).

It should also be noted that different *measures* of identity can produce much higher reservoirs of such dual identities (see, for example, Bond & Rosie, 2002, 2010).

The second point relates to Britishness, which represented a majority in both England (68%) and Wales (61%), but just half of respondents in Scotland (49%). We should be wary in assuming that Britishness *means* the same thing in each place and that there is just 'less of it' in Scotland. As noted, the term 'British' (as with any other identity) must be treated with critical caution: its meaning and nuance may, in fact, be quite varied (this is particularly clear in Northern Ireland, as explored below). This leads us to the third point which concerns 'sub-state' identities. In England slightly more people chose being British than chose being English: in Wales the two identities were broadly equally chosen; whilst in Scotland considerably more people chose to describe themselves as Scottish. The position of Britishness relevant to the 'local' national identity thus differs markedly across Britain. Finally no other proffered territorial identity has widespread popularity (though about one-in-seven respondents in Wales felt English).

Northern Ireland is missing from table 1 because the 'open' question on identity has not been asked there for a decade (the last major vehicle to ask an 'open' identity question was the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2003). The open question is less relevant in Northern Ireland since few would argue that the relevant sub-state identity in Northern Ireland - Northern Irishness - is *national* in character (see Gallagher, 1995). Indeed a sharp cleavage between state identity (actual or desired) is at the very heart of Northern Ireland's Troubles "and for most people national identity boils down to a mutually exclusive choice between British *or* Irish" (Bond & Rosie, 2010: 86. See also Coakley, 2007). In 2003, for example, just 3% of people in Northern Ireland reported feeling *both* British and Irish; likewise just 4% felt both Irish and Northern Irish, and just 13% as both British and Northern Irish. Given the much lower incidence of overlap between identities, Northern Irish surveys tend to ask only for which identity 'best' describes the respondent. This is directly comparable to a follow up question in the British and Scottish surveys which asks respondents who have chosen two or more identities to indicate which of these 'best describes the way you think of yourself'.

Table 2, then, shows responses to that question of 'best' identity. In England we again find that Britishness 'outweighed' Englishness, though not by a very great deal; whilst in Wales we saw rather greater weight given to Welshness (with just over half choosing this as their 'best' identity). In Scotland, quite notably, a very large majority (75%) selected Scottishness as their best identity, compared to just 16% who chose Britishness. Clearly - and as other studies have shown - the primary national identity at play North of the Tweed is Scottishness (see, e.g. McCrone, 1997; Kiely et al, 2005; Bond & Rosie, 2010). In Northern Ireland we see a different pattern again with three identities having prominence - British, Irish, and Northern Irish. To a large extent - as we shall see - the first two of these are religiously, ethnically and politically coded 'opposites', whilst Northern Irishness identity may serve, to some extent, as an 'escape route' from these:



Table 2  
**'Best' choice identities, 2009-11**

	ENGLAND	SCOTLAND	WALES	NORTHERN IRELAND
British	47	16	35	36
English	40	2	8	
European	3	2	1	
Irish	1	1	1	29
Northern Irish	*	*	-	28
Scottish	1	75	1	
Ulster	-	*	*	3
Welsh	1	*	53	
Other answer	5	4	1	5
None of these	1	*	*	
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>8,751</i>	<i>4,174</i>	<i>557</i>	<i>2,433</i>

Sources:

England, Wales = merged BSA datasets 2009-2011;

Scotland = merged SSA datasets 2009-2011

N. Ireland = merged NILT datasets 2009-10.

Note – NILT did not offer certain identities to their respondents – in the table above these identities are denoted by blank cells

### **Britishness: Ethnic Underpinnings?**

It is clear that national identities, and in particular Britishness, are not common to these islands but, rather, vary very significantly across them. To what extent, though, is Britishness underpinned by ethnic/religious factors and are such factors similar across the UK? In short, does Britishness still operate as a unifying 'glue' across the UK and, if so, does it do so in the same way in different places? Such analysis is constrained by the limitations of the available survey materials and their samples. BSA and NILT, for example, do not routinely ask respondents where they born; and the sample sizes for religious and ethnic minorities in these surveys and in SSA tend to be small. Because of these limitations careful explanation of what the data can and cannot tell us is essential. We begin with a short summary for each territory: in Northern Ireland we will necessarily be concerned with 'best identity': elsewhere we will focus on the more 'open' question on national identity.

#### Britishness in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is a useful place to begin since it contains a popular form of Britishness that most people in the rest of the United Kingdom do not understand, let alone share. Yet the 'defensive' link between Britishness and Protestantism found in Northern Ireland springs from the very same historic Britishness, forged as it was – *pace* Colley – in wars against Catholic France and in the pursuit of a great imperial project. Thomas Jones Barker's *The*

*Secret of England's Greatness* (c.1863) encapsulates the intermixture of Crown, Empire and Protestantism in its portrayal of Victoria gifting a Bible to a servile African Prince (National Portrait Gallery, n.d.). Whilst many might see such a portrait as symbolic of a Britain long past, in Northern Ireland it continues to figure on Orange Banners and can be seen as a very potent and contemporary claim both to 'Ulster's' place within the family of British nations, and its key role as the defender of Union. England may have forgotten, or discarded, the Secret of its (former) Greatness: Protestant Ulster has not.

Notably, very few – just 6% - of Northern Ireland's Catholics describe 'British' as their best identity, as compared to 61% of Northern Ireland's Protestants. Britishness is higher amongst those Protestants who support one of the two major Unionist parties (amongst both Ulster Unionists and Democratic Unionists 65% chose being British): Alliance-supporting Protestants are as likely to describe their key identity as Northern Irish (41%) as they are to describe it as British (43%). We also find a strong association between national identity and the Constitution, with the overwhelming majority (91%) of British identifiers wishing to remain within the United Kingdom. If Protestant-Unionism is a key underpinning of Northern Ireland's Britishness, are there other ethnic factors beyond the historic 'sectarian' divide? Here we are limited by the data: NILT in 2009 and 2010 did not ask respondents where they were born, and whilst there are questions on ethnicity/race and on religion, the released data is in fact quite restrictive. The only released data on ethnicity is whether or not the respondent considers themselves 'to be a member of a minority ethnic community' – accounting for 5% of the survey - but we cannot dig much deeper to see what kinds of groups and nationalities are involved.

We constructed binary logistic regression models to identify key predictors of choosing a 'best identity', respectively, as British and as Irish. The independent variables explored were gender, age (in years), religion, and whether or not the respondent described themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority. We found very striking religious and ethnic effects. Taking the religious first, Protestants were more than twice as likely to claim a British 'best identity' as the non-religious, whilst Catholics were just one one-ninth as likely. In other words Protestants are – with age, sex and ethnicity held constant – around *twenty five* times more likely than Catholics to claim Britishness as their preferred identity. As we will see when we consider the other territories this is a remarkable and perhaps unparalleled level of difference.

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that respondents describing themselves as 'minority ethnic' in Northern Ireland were very unlikely to describe themselves as British. Members of such groups, perhaps, regard themselves as outside, and unwilling to be aligned within, a fierce conflict over territory and identity. This view was supported by our model on Irishness which indicated that Catholics were around fifty times more likely (other variables being held constant) than Protestants to choose being Irish as their 'best identity'. Here too we found that minority ethnic respondents highly unlikely to choose an

Irish identity: both 'Irish' and 'British' are heavily coded in Northern Ireland, and do not offer a comfortable identity for minorities.

### Britishness in England

In sharp contrast to Northern Ireland we have much better data coverage for England. There is also a very different pattern of identity: on the 'open' question choosing Britishness was embraced by a majority in almost all ethnic/religious sub-groups, and even in groups where it was not (amongst respondents born outwith the UK and amongst the 'Asian: Other' and 'Other' ethnic groups), it was chosen by around half. That is, Britishness in England seems to be a relatively open, broadly 'civic' identity, with no clear and exclusive ethnic basis (see Cohen, 1994). We see a very different pattern for Englishness. Being born in England was a key factor, and there was a clear correlation with visible ethnicity: in every group except 'White' only a minority (and sometimes rather small minorities) described themselves as English. In only two religious groups (albeit the largest ones: Church of England identifiers and those of No religion) did we find an English majority. Both of these groups were both disproportionately born in England and disproportionately 'White':

These findings map onto previous research. A Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) study in 2006 found a:

... sharp difference in the ways in which white English and ethnic minority participants [in England] thought of themselves. Most white English participants saw themselves as English, first and foremost, but also as British. By contrast, most ethnic minority participants ... saw themselves as British, to the exclusion of any identification with England, since they strongly associated England with white English people.

CRE, 2006: 37

Using logistic regression on the 2011 BSA dataset (the only one in our series to record the respondent's country of birth) we found a complex picture of the ethnic/cultural bases of British identity in England. We found no statistically significant difference between Whites and South Asians, although Black Britons are more likely to describe themselves as British, and Other Asians less likely. Likewise, whilst all the various Christian denominations (including Catholics) and Hindus are no more or less likely than the irreligious to describe themselves as British, Muslims and Other Non-Christians are *more* likely.

Britishness in England, then, is an open and 'civic' identity, but it was one more open to – or at least more frequently chosen by – certain minorities. To an extent this pattern may be explained by the extent to which the other main identity found in England – Englishness – is ethnically coded. Logistic regression on whether respondents feel English found that being of minority religion and minority ethnicity were very important negative predictors: in particular, Asians, Blacks, and Muslims were highly unlikely to select an English identity. Given this, for at least some within these groups Britishness

may be the *only* 'UK' identity they feel appropriate or open to them. Britishness, therefore, operates as a 'civic canopy' which can accommodate those who feel comfortable with Englishness, but also those who do not.

### Being British in Wales

Unpicking relationships in Wales is difficult because of the limitations of recent surveys. Nevertheless, as table 3 shows, we can discern some broad trends. Birthplace is crucial, with clear differences between those born in Wales and those born in England. For those born in Wales, being British was less frequently chosen than being Welsh (82% as compared to 56%); for those born in England far more (80%) choose being British than choose being Welsh (16%). Notably (though not shown in the table) half (48%) of the England-born in Wales also describe themselves as English. Whilst an English identity is highly salient for this group, it is Britishness that emerges as the key identity.

We are sorely limited in taking this analysis further, however, since we only know the birthplaces of respondents in the 2011 survey. The lack of minority ethnic and minority faith respondents in the surveys makes it impossible to draw any conclusions for Wales, though the CRE (2006: 35) found that participants in Wales, including BME respondents, were more likely to describe themselves as Welsh rather than British. We do have sufficient data to suggest that intra-Christian differences are modest. Catholics seem (although the sample size is small) to be less likely to choose being Welsh, though this may well be largely explained through birthplace. 'Other Christians' –incorporating those Protestant groups which were historically strong in Wales – are no more or less likely to choose being Welsh, but do appear to be less likely to describe themselves as British:

Table 3  
**National identities in Wales**

<b>WALES</b>	<b>British</b>	<b>Welsh</b>
All	61	63
Born in Wales *	56	82
Born in England *	80	16
No religion	63	64
Catholic **	64	41
Church of Wales/Anglican	62	65
Other Christian	47	64
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>557</i>	<i>557</i>

Source: BSA merged 2009-2011 datasets.

(\* birth data based on 2011 only, unweighted base = 174)

(\*\* unweighted base of Catholic sub-sample < 50)

### Scotland and Britishness

Finally, in Scotland we found (as have previous studies – e.g. McCrone et al 1998; Kiely et al 2001; Rosie 2012) that a very substantial proportion of the differences found in claiming Scottishness disappear when we control for place of birth. Overall, 83% of respondents in Scotland described themselves as Scottish and 49% as British. Amongst respondents born in Scotland, however, Scottishness rose to 94%, whilst Britishness remained at 49%. Three points are important here: Scottishness is very widespread in Scotland and claimed by almost everyone born in Scotland; Britishness, however, is also claimed by substantial numbers (including around half of the Scotland-born); and many respondents claim to be both Scottish and British. The position of minorities is interesting: although some sample sizes are small – these are indicated in the table through asterisks - there is no apparent pattern across religion or ethnicity when we control for birth-place. We find that choosing Scottish identity is ubiquitous amongst the Scotland-born in *all* groups. If Britishness plays a ‘civic canopy’ role in England, it appears to be Scottishness that fulfils this function in Scotland. Again this chimes with the small-scale CRE study, which found that “In Scotland and Wales – and this was true among both white and ethnic minority participants – there was a much stronger identification with each country than with Britain” (2006:35):

Table 4:

#### **Identities in Scotland amongst respondents born in Scotland**

	<b>British</b>	<b>Scottish</b>
All	49	94
No religion	46	94
Christian (no denomination)	59	89
Catholic	45	95
Church of Scotland	54	94
Episcopalian *	57	93
Other Christian	54	90
Muslim **	27	100
Other Non-Christian *	52	96
White: All origins	49	94
South Asian origins *	46	100
Others *	50	92

Source: SSA merged 2009-2011 datasets.

(\* unweighted base of sub-sample < 50)

What, though, of Britishness? Here there was more variation, although most subgroups hovered around the 50% mark. One intriguing exception to this is Scotland's native-born Muslims who did not embrace Britishness to any great extent (note, however the small sample size). To some extent this might represent a particular identity shift relating to UK wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Scottishness being seen as more 'welcoming' and accommodating than Britishness within the Scottish context (see Hussain & Miller, 2006, on Scottish Pakistanis and Saaed et al (1999) and Hopkins (2004, 2007) on Scottish Muslims). Certainly Muslims in Scotland and in England seem markedly different in their positioning to British and sub-state identities.

Finally, what of those born in England? Here we find patterns broadly comparable to those found in Wales. On the 'open' question a relatively high proportion of England-born respondents chose being British (68%) with a sizeable minority choosing being English (38%). In both Scotland and Wales, then, being born in England is associated with higher levels of British identity than amongst the 'native born'. There are, though, no hard and impermeable lines of difference here: notably, almost as many Scottish residents born in England describe themselves as being Scottish (35%) as choose being English (38%).

### **British Together: Defending the Union?**

The survey evidence from 2009-11 makes it abundantly clear that Britishness is not 'common' across the constituent parts of the United Kingdom but *varies* across them. Neither is there much evidence that the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century (White) Protestant Britishness that formed Colley's historic glue of the United Kingdom holds any 21<sup>st</sup> Century social purchase *except* in Northern Ireland. In England Britishness operates as a 'civic canopy', and attracts certain minorities (most notably Muslims), perhaps since Englishness seems to be strongly coded as 'white'. In Wales and Scotland Britishness is associated with place of birth, with the England-born in particular embracing it as their primary identity - and in Scotland *Scottishness* operates as the 'civic canopy'. What, though, of Britishness as a political identity related to maintaining the cohesion of the United Kingdom? Whilst we will show that this is quite clearly the (cohesive *and* divisive) role of Britishness in Northern Ireland, does it possess strong 'constitutional' meanings elsewhere?

In Northern Ireland there is a clear association between Britishness and support for continued union with the rest of the United Kingdom. The overwhelming majority of those for whom British was the 'best' identity – 91% - took such a position, compared to just 40% of those who chose Irish. Those who claim 'Other' identities as paramount are most likely to 'opt out' of the constitutional debate, with a third (32%) answering 'other' or 'don't know'. Notably a similar proportion of those describing themselves as members of an ethnic minority take the same position.

If British unionism is alive and well in Northern Ireland, it still has discernible effects in Scotland, at least in a loose and 'descriptive' form. Most people in

the Scottish surveys 2009-11 – 67% - wanted to remain in the United Kingdom (and might thus be termed, if cautiously, as ‘unionist’). This held true across national identity, and included 62% of those who describe their ‘best identity’ as Scottish. It should be noted, of course, that there is no easy conflation between national identity and more specific constitutional preference in Scotland (on the ‘non-alignment’ found here see Bond 2000, 2009). Strikingly, though, support for the Union was much stronger amongst British identifiers (82%), and particularly dominant amongst those who declare British to be their best identity (91%). Scotland’s unionism was, however, in tune with the spirit of Gladstone: the most popular constitutional choice regardless of identity was that of a powerful Holyrood within the United Kingdom.

Interestingly, opinions on Scotland’s future were remarkably similar in England (table 5) although respondents in England were more likely to favour Scotland being part of the United Kingdom *without* a devolved parliament. (Note that only a sub-sample of England’s respondents in BSA 2011 were asked this question):

Table 5:  
**Views on Scotland’s future**

	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>England</b>
Remain part of the United Kingdom <u>without</u> a Scottish Parliament	8	19
Remain part of the United Kingdom, with a Scottish Parliament <u>without</u> tax powers	8	12
Remain part of the United Kingdom, Scottish Parliament with <u>some</u> tax powers	50	33
<b>All ‘unionist’</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>63</b>
Independent, within EU	17	15
Independent, Outside EU	10	11
<b>All ‘independence’</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>
Other/DK	6	11
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>4,164</i>	<i>967</i>

Sources:

Scotland - merged SSA datasets 2009-2011

England - BSA 2011

To what extent did ethnicity and religion play a role in attitudes towards Scotland’s future? Here we constructed logistic regression models for those taking unionist positions (broadly defined as those wishing Scotland to remain part of the UK) in both Scotland and England. From our earlier analysis we know that ethnicity and religion had a complex and territorially varying relationship with Britishness; here we explored whether, and to what extent,

religion/ethnicity and national identification were significant in explaining 'unionist' sentiment in Scotland and England.

For Scotland we found that the key predictor of a broadly unionist position was *national identity*. British identifiers (on the 'open' question) were three times more likely (other things being equal) to be unionist than those who did not describe themselves as British. Further, Scottish identifiers were less likely to be unionist than those who did not identify as Scottish. Race/ethnicity played no significant role, with only limited effects for religion (most notably here, for our purposes, that the 'Other Religion' group were less likely, all other factors held constant, to take a unionist position). Race/ethnicity and religion did not feature at all in our model for England's views on Scotland. Here, as in Scotland, there were class and age effects (older people are more likely to be unionist, working class people less likely) and more modest national identity effects. In England an English identification was not significant, but those who felt British were half as likely again to be unionist as those who did not.

## Conclusion

Surveys in the period immediately prior to the long campaign around Scotland's independence referendum illuminates how both Britishness and 'unionism' varied across the different territories of the United Kingdom. It revealed the very different ethnic and religious 'coding' (or not) of Britishness across territory, and the broad *irrelevance* of ethnic and religious division outside Northern Ireland with regard to unionism. In England Britishness proves to be a 'civic canopy', an identity claimed across all sorts of ethnic groups. Notably, such a role in Scotland is played by Scottishness.

These differences beg the question of what 'the Union' might mean for different Britons in different places. Certainly the Union remains the defining question in Northern Irish politics, and is a key question in Scotland (and, increasingly, Wales). But there is evidence that those who believe in the unionist integrity of the United Kingdom – measured in terms of Northern Ireland and Scotland remaining part of the UK – are overwhelmingly supportive of devolution in these islands (or at least for its so-called peripheries). Almost 130 years on Gladstone's rather fuzzy vision of Home Rule All Around has been largely embraced. And this fuzzy constitutional settlement does not seem to unduly concern (or, perhaps, interest) the UK's ethnic minorities.

In Scotland such minorities *feel* Scottish and are just as likely to support (or oppose) further constitutional change as their fellow Scots. In Northern Ireland minorities locate themselves between (or perhaps outwith) the religious-national divide. In England, despite very high levels of Britishness amongst some minorities, these exhibit little particular anxiety on Scotland's place within the UK. This may be suggestive that England's minorities to some extent conflate England and Britain (as do their ethnic majority neighbours – see Langlands, 1999): a *post*-union Britishness may seem contradictory, or



even endangered, in Scotland and Northern Ireland (and, in all probability, Wales) but may make sense in England because of the lack of a clear distinction there between 'state' and 'sub-state' identities.

What future, then, is there for unionism and for Britishness? Overall, the latter seems in better health, taking the UK as a whole, than the former. Unionism has splintered into different 'peripheral' visions and has largely withered in the centre. That respondents in England show a remarkably similar pattern of opinion on Scotland's future to respondents in Scotland suggests one of two things: that they are 'sold' on the benefits to the UK of devolution to the other nations, or that they are quite relaxed about Scotland making its own decisions on most matters. Unionism, then, seems to have become flexible and territorially specific, even to the point of its own disappearance. Britishness, on the other hand, remains a widespread identity even if what we *mean* by 'British' may differ, and indeed may differ quite substantially, across these islands. That diversity may be a strength far more than it is a weakness, and allow a flexible Britishness to survive further constitutional change. Finally, Britishness in England continues to operate as a unifying and civic identity under which ethnic minorities can be accommodated – and shows little sign of being troubled by any prospective 'break up of Britain'.

## REFERENCES

BBC (2014) 'Scottish referendum: Scotland votes 'No' to independence', 19 September (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-29270441>)

Ian Birrell (2013) 'The immigration debate: evidence-free and more rancid than ever', *The Guardian*, 25 March.

Ross Bond (2000) 'Squaring the Circles: Demonstrating and Explaining the Political 'Non-Alignment' of Scottish National Identity', *Scottish Affairs*, 32, 15-35

Ross Bond (2009) 'Political Attitudes and National Identities in Scotland and England' in Bechhofer & McCrone (ed), *National Identity, Nationalism and Constitutional Change*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ross Bond & Michael Rosie (2002) 'National Identities in post-devolution Scotland' *Scottish Affairs*, 40, pp34-53.

Ross Bond & Michael Rosie (2010): National Identities and Attitudes to Constitutional Change in Post-Devolution UK: A Four Territories Comparison, *Regional & Federal Studies*, 20:1, 83-105.

Callum G. Brown (2009), *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000*, London: Routledge (Second Edition)

David Clegg (2015) 'Murphy: We jail too many women', *Daily Record*, 14 January, p2

John Coakley (2007), 'National Identity in Northern Ireland: Stability or Change?', *Nations and Nationalism*, 13 (4), pp573–597.

Robin Cohen (1994), *Frontiers of Identity: The British and the Others*. London: Longman.

Linda Colley (1996), *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, London: Vintage.

Commission for Racial Equality (2006), *Citizenship and Belonging: What is Britishness?*, London: CRE.

Michael Gallagher (1995) 'How many nations are there in Ireland?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18 (4), pp715-739.

William Gladstone (1886) 'Motion for Leave: Government of Ireland Bill', *House of Commons Debates*, Volume 304: 1049, 1052, 08 April.

Eve Hepburn (2011), 'Citizens of the Region. Party Conceptions of Regional Citizenship and Immigrant Integration', *European Journal of Political Research*, 50 (4), 504-529.

Eve Hepburn (2014) 'Independence and the Immigration Debate in Scotland', *British Politics Review*, 9(2): 10-12.

Eve Hepburn & Ricard Zapata-Barrero (2014) 'Introduction: Immigration Policies in Multilevel States' in Hepburn & Zapata-Barrero (eds) *The Politics of Immigration in Multilevel States: Governance and Political Parties*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Eve Hepburn & Michael Rosie (2014) 'Immigration, Nationalism and Political Parties in Scotland' in Hepburn, E. and R. Zapata-Barrero (eds) *The Politics of Immigration in Multilevel States: Governance and Political Parties*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Peter Hopkins (2004) 'Young Muslim Men in Scotland: Inclusions and Exclusions', *Children's Geographies*, 2 (2), pp257–272

Peter Hopkins (2007) "Blue squares", "proper" Muslims and transnational networks: Narratives of national and religious identities amongst young Muslim men living in Scotland', *Ethnicities* 7 (1), 61-81.

Asifa Hussain and William Miller (2006) *Multicultural Nationalism: Islamophobia, Anglophobia, and Devolution*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Richard Kiely, Frank Bechhofer, Robert Stewart and David McCrone (2001), 'The markers and rules of Scottish national identity', *Sociological Review*, 49 (1), 33-55.

Richard Kiely, David McCrone, and Frank Bechhofer (2005), 'Whither Britishness? English and Scottish People in Scotland,' *Nations and Nationalism*, 11 (1), pp65–82.

Krishan Kumar (2003), *The Making of English National Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rebecca Langlands (1999), 'Britishness or Englishness? The historical problem of national identity in Britain', *Nations and Nationalism*, 5 (1), 53-69.

Alistair Lexden (2012), 'All in the name', *The House Magazine*, 01 November, pp46-48

David McCrone (1997), 'Unmasking Britannia: the Rise and Fall of British National Identity', *Nations and Nationalism*, 3 (4), pp579–596.

David McCrone, Robert Stewart, Richard Kiely and Frank Bechhofer (1998), 'Who Are We? Problematising national identity', *Sociological Review*, 46 (4), 629-652

Tariq Modood (2007), *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea*, London: Polity.

National Portrait Gallery, *The Secret of England's Greatness*, <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw00071/The-Secret-of-Englands-Greatness-Queen-Victoria-presenting-a-Bible-in-the-Audience-Chamber-at-Windsor>

Bhikhu Parekh (2000), *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, London: Profile Books.

Harry Reid (2013), 'United we will stand – but for how long?', *The Scotsman*, 30 April

Michael Rosie (2012) 'Who Are You? National Identity and Contemporary Return Migrants in Scotland' in Mario Varricchio (ed), *Back to Caledonia: Scottish Return Migration from the Sixteenth Century to the Present*, Edinburgh: John Donald.

Michael Rosie and Ross Bond (2006) 'Routes into Scottishness', in Catherine Bromley et al (eds) *Has Devolution Delivered?* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Amir Saeed, Neil Blain, and Douglas Forbes (1999) 'New ethnic and national questions in Scotland: post-British identities among Glasgow Pakistani teenagers', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (5), 821-844.

Scotsman (2013), 'Scottish independence: Businessmen slam debate', *The Scotsman*, 11 May.

Scottish Labour (2011), *Fighting for What Really Matters*. Glasgow: Scottish Labour.

Scottish Labour (2013), *Powers for a purpose - strengthening devolution: Scottish Labour Devolution Commission, Interim Report*. Glasgow: Scottish Labour.

Scottish Labour (2014), 'Scottish Conference 2014' (<http://www.scottishlabour.org.uk/campaigns/entry/scottish-conference-2014>)

Scottish Liberal Democrats (2011), *Solutions for Scotland: Scottish Liberal Democrats Manifesto, 2011*, Edinburgh: Scottish Liberal Democrats.

David Seawright (1996) 'The Scottish Unionist Party: What's in a Name?', *Scottish Affairs*, 14, pp90-102

Sunday Mail (2013), 'Mail Opinion: Scottish independence debate should start now', *Sunday Mail*, 05 May.

Sunday Mail (2015), 'Dugdale: I'm not a unionist', *Sunday Mail*, 18 January, p14

Margaret Thatcher (1988), Address to Scottish Conservative conference,  
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107240>

Margaret Thatcher (1985a), Address to Scottish Conservative Conference,  
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106046>

Margaret Thatcher (1985b), Press conference, Hillsborough Castle after  
Anglo-Irish Agreement, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106173>